

Bite-size Parent's guide

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Introduction

Welcome to the ASA Learn to Swim Bite-size Parent's Guide – a handy resource with helpful hints, tips and advice when your child is learning to swim.

The ASA is the National Governing Body for swimming in England and our aim is to encourage more people to learn to swim and have fun swimming more often.

You will probably be most familiar with us through our world renowned Learn to Swim programme and award scheme that has already taught millions of children to swim. We encourage everyone to check that their swimming lessons are using the British Gas ASA Learn to Swim Pathway, which is the national syllabus to assist and support the delivery of swimming lessons. Following the Pathway will allow your child to enjoy the water and increase the likelihood of lifelong participation in swimming as part of a healthy lifestyle. The *Kellogg's* ASA Awards Scheme complements the Pathway and rewards children all over the world when they are learning to swim. It continues to be by far the most successful grass-roots programme in British sport.

For a full and comprehensive overview of the Pathway and more useful ideas on how to increase water confidence and support your child through their aquatic journey get the complete ASA Learn to Swim Parent's Guide. This will give you further advice and support to help you understand the expectations and assessment standards required for your child to progress with their swimming.

Why Learn to Swim?

Swimming is not only one of the safest and most popular forms of exercise, it's a life skill and it is vital that young people are given the opportunity to learn to swim for their own safety. Children who do not have the opportunity to learn to swim are unlikely to swim as an adult as part of a healthy lifestyle.

It is so important that you support your child in learning to swim – our own research into school swimming in 2012 revealed that 1 in 3 children leave primary school unable to swim. 1 in 6 parents said they never take their child swimming, yet 98% of parents agreed that every child should be able to swim when they leave primary school.

By learning to swim from an early age, your child is more likely to enjoy swimming opportunities in the future; the British Gas ASA Learn to Swim Pathway creates competent, confident and safe swimmers with a wide skill base to help them reach their potential in swimming and other fun water-based activities such as water polo, diving, canoeing, sailing and snorkelling.



The ASA Learn to Swim Pathway

Following the Pathway should ultimately result in your child being able to swim the four strokes; front crawl, breaststroke, backstroke and butterfly. Your child will also develop a variety of skills which are easily transferable to other aquatic and land based sports. The Learn to Swim Pathway incorporates the following Frameworks:

- ASA Foundation Framework
- ASA Learn to Swim Framework Stages 1-7
- ASA Aquatic Skills Framework Stages 8-10

For swimmers that need smaller stepping stones we have created Alpha Step, as part of the ASA Foundation Framework. Alpha Step Awards are a great incentive for swimmers who may be struggling to reach other milestones and need to be rewarded for the achievements they are making in developing water confidence.

The ASA also offers specialised adult swimming lessons for all abilities, whether you're a beginner, a returner or a more advanced swimmer looking to refine your swimming technique. The ASA Adult Swimming Framework can be adapted to the needs of each individual, for adults looking to improve their skills in a friendly and supportive environment.

The Swimming Essentials

- Safe Entry
- Safe Exit
- Floatation and Balance
- An understanding of Buoyancy
- Rotation and Orientation
- Streamlining
- Aquatic Breathing
- Travel and Co-ordination
- Water Safety

The time it takes for a swimmer to develop these crucial skills will depend on their own personal development, your child should not become disheartened if they progress at a different rate to other children in their lesson. You and their swimming teacher will play a key role in keeping them motivated.

For a further details on all the Learn to Swim Frameworks and the Swimming Essentials get the complete ASA Learn to Swim Parent's Guide.



A Fun Approach to Learning to Swim

A child develops basic movement skills between 5-8 years for girls and 6-9 years for boys. At this age your child should take part in activities that build their fundamental movement skills, with the emphasis on learning through fun. A fun environment is the best way for children to learn and acquire new skills. Having fun and playing games in the water will build a strong foundation for your child to develop new skills.

You can actively support your child in their Learn to Swim programme through regular swimming trips as a family, this will build your child's confidence and ensure a successful and memorable learn to swim experience.

Games For The Pool – try some of these to make your trip to the pool even more fun!

- **Underwater humming:** In pairs or small groups all duck under the water, one person hums a favourite tune for the others to guess.
- **Fishy in the middle:** A watery version of piggy in the middle for three players. The fishy in the middle has to try and catch a soft or inflatable ball as the others throw it overhead.

For a full list of games and fun activities get the complete ASA Learn to Swim Parent's Guide.

Swimming for Young Children and Babies

The best age for babies to start pool activities is around six months but check with your health visitor before you take a dip. Babies are comfortable in the water as long as they feel safe and will instinctively move arms and legs when immersed.

When you go swimming try to submerge your baby to shoulder level, babies out of the water will soon become cold. Watch your baby's face so you can monitor their reactions and keep moving to familiarise your baby with the feeling of travelling through the water.

As a parent, you can play an active role in increasing water confidence in young children and babies, even at home. Use bath time as a way to get your baby used to the water, children should be encouraged and helped to wet faces, tummies and hair, splash with hands and feet, blow bubbles, sing and play in the bath. Keep bath time short and reassure your baby by smiling, talking to them and maintaining eye contact.

Many pools offer adult and child swimming classes and this is an excellent way to engage your child in water activities in a fun environment. In these sessions core aquatic skills such as buoyancy and balance begin to develop and confident toddlers often progress to a stage where they are swimming without buoyancy aids.

Swim a Song is a fun and progressive programme of activities for babies and pre-school children, linked to the *Kellogg's* ASA Awards. Swim a Song has been specifically developed to introduce babies and young children to water activities and acts as a stepping stone for the ASA Learn to Swim Framework.



Family swimming sessions are another excellent way of building water confidence in pre-school aged children. If your child is nervous, don't worry, many babies go through a stage where they are afraid of water so be reassured you are not alone. Try and ensure bath time and swimming are relaxing and fun experiences.

Taming Toddler Tantrums

Are you experiencing problems in getting your child used to the pool? Maybe they have a 'meltdown' every week before their swimming lesson? Here are some tips to help your child enjoy their swimming and make them want to come back for more!

1. **Take them swimming yourself:** Your child will feel more at ease with the aquatic environment and more relaxed when it comes to swimming lessons.
2. **Watch a swimming lesson:** By taking your child to watch a swimming lesson and talking through what your child should expect, you can instil confidence and an aspiration to take part. Your child will also get the chance to meet their teacher.
3. **Let it be their decision:** Don't force them into it: If your child is prone to a poolside 'meltdown' it is often best not to force them to join the class. Your child will not enjoy the experience, won't learn very much and it may disrupt others. Instead sit down with them to watch the lesson, they will often make their own decision to join in.
4. **Build the whole swimming experience up into a treat:** Have a treat lined up afterwards such as a hot chocolate if they perform well. Every session can be a fun experience with a reward.
5. **During your family swims, include parts of the swimming lesson:** This can include blowing bubbles, submerging or floating with support.



Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the ASA Learn to Swim Pathway?

The ASA Learn to Swim Pathway is the national syllabus produced by the ASA to assist and support the delivery of swimming lessons. It is a single pathway for swimmers to learn how to be competent and confident in the water, allowing them to participate in aquatic sports such as diving, synchronised swimming, water polo and rookie lifesaving later on.

2. What can I do to prepare my child for their first swimming lesson?

Starting swimming lessons is a big step for many children. Prior to your child's first lesson visit the pool to familiarise your child with the water environment, talk through what your child should expect during the lesson and explain who their class teacher will be. Children's books such as Topsy and Tim: Learn To Swim by Adamson and Adamson can help set the scene and relieve any worry before the lessons start.

Some Learn to Swim programmes have a dress code, for example no long shorts, check this with your pool and anything extra you may need to bring. Involve your child in what they need for their swimming lesson so they know what to expect and arrive in plenty of time to park and help your child get ready in good time. As well as swimwear and a towel, you may also want to bring shampoo, shower gel, hair clips and hair bands, a swimming cap, locker money, goggles and arm bands.

3. What should I expect from each lesson?

The lessons should be led by an ASA qualified swimming teacher and each class should have a maximum of 12 swimmers. The lesson should take place in a fun and safe learning environment with a variety of fun-based activities to help the swimmers learn new skills. The teacher will provide feedback and

instruction to help each individual swimmer develop throughout the lesson. Some swimmers may be given slightly different activities depending on their strengths and weaknesses to help them focus on their individual needs. When a swimmer is able to complete all the outcomes consistently they will be awarded a badge and may be moved into a new class depending on the structure and size of the programme.

4. How long will it take a swimmer to pass each stage?

This will vary with every swimmer depending on their skills and experience. If a swimmer has the experience of pre-school or adult and child sessions then they may move faster initially through the Framework Stages 1 & 2 because they will be familiar with the environment and more confident in the water. Some children are more naturally competent and confident in the water and therefore will progress faster. Other children are slower to learn new skills but can quite often become stronger more proficient swimmers as they progress. The most important factor is that each child learns to swim and enjoys learning to swim. If you are concerned about your child's progress, or your child is not enjoying the lessons, speak to your swimming lesson co-ordinator.

5. What should I do if I think my child has completed an outcome/stage and the teacher has not issued a badge or acknowledged it?

Teachers are encouraged to continually assess each child, however schemes will administer the presentation of badges and awards in different ways, so if in any doubt ask your teacher or the pool reception staff. It is also worthwhile remembering that children need to show some consistency in their ability to perform the tasks so the teachers will keep an eye on swimmers to ensure they can do the task more than once.



6. How long is it recommended my child should stay in swimming lessons for?

Learning to swim is a life skill and it is therefore important that any swimmer stays with the programme until they become competent and strong. Swimming should be seen in the same light as reading or writing, learning is just the start of development. The ASA recommends a swimmer completes up to Stage 7 of the Framework through swimming lessons to give them a solid base to help them enjoy swimming and swimming related activities later. Swimming is an excellent sport for developing a basic fitness level that will help with participation in other sports. Research has proven that young people who develop a variety of transferable sports skills at a young age are more likely to excel in other sports as they get older. The advantage of swimming is it puts less strain on developing joints than other sports.

7. Where does a child with a disability fit into the framework?

The Additional Needs phase provides progressive steps for those participants who require additional help prior to entering Stage 1 of the Framework. The *Hellogg's* ASA Alpha Step Awards support the Additional Needs Phase of the Framework. The swimmer then progresses into the Framework Stages. It must be recognised that some children may never be able to achieve all stages of the Framework but the ASA does provide resources and training to try and help swimming teachers provide a comprehensive programme.

For more FAQ's get the complete ASA Learn to Swim Parent's Guide.

For more information on the ASA Learn to Swim Pathway visit www.swimming.org/goswimming

Celebrating your child's success, the *Kellogg's* ASA Award Scheme



**Reward your
child's achievements**
– whether that's a Stage
award, or an award for
swimming a certain
distance, using a specific
stroke or being safe in
the water.

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